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 SUBJECT: KMARA ACTIVISTS UPDATE

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1. Summary: The vivacious anti-Shevardnadze youth movement Kmara captured the attention of the public and media in the months leading up to and during the November 2003 Rose Revolution. This student group, which played a crucial role in mobilizing the opposition against former President Shevardnadze's government, appears to be losing support and momentum under the new administration. On 3 June, 2004, 250 activists split off from the student youth movement Kmara, and many of them joined Igor Giorgadze's party "Samartlianoba" (Justice). Since its first public demonstration in April 2003 and through the Rose Revolution, the ad hoc nature of Kmara, with the guidance and resources of the NGO community, allowed the movement to play a crucial role in helping to mobilize the people against the government(refel). Despite the activists' continued involvement protesting against Abashidze in Ajara, incipient activities in South Ossetia, and a planned movement in Abkhazia, the continued lack of funding, space, and increased reliance on a separate NGO for resources and an agenda in a changed political climate is rendering Kmara obsolete. Without Shevardnadze's government to oppose, this youth movement has lost popularity and become little more than a hotline for anyone with grievances. End Summary.

 Kmara: An Overview

2. On 14 June, 2004, Political Assistant met with one of the founders and current leaders of the Kmara movement, []

[] to discuss its recent fragmentation.
 [] graduated from Tbilisi State University (TSU)

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REVIEW AUTHORITY: Robert Homme, Senior Reviewer

in 2002 with a degree in International Relations and now works for the Soros-funded NGO Liberty Institute full-time in the area of educational reform. She was eager to talk about the Kmara movement. Later [] another young founder and the public voice of the movement in the media, joined [] She also works at the Liberty Institute on cases concerning human rights violations and has one year remaining in law school. The latter activist, not speaking much English, mostly listened in, but did respond to a few questions about which [] was uncertain, such as about the movement's work in South Ossetia and its future. The Kmara movement was started at TSU by a group of ten to fifteen students who also belonged to an organization formed unofficially in 2000 called the Students of Government Movement. Unsatisfied with the quality of education and the lecturers, they wanted to see change in the university system. Kmara ("enough") appeared publicly in April 2003 to protest against the current government in hopes of bringing about reform. According to [] (and the website), the group's inspiration for action came from a pro-democratic Serbian student movement called Otpor that united against then Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic.

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3. From the beginning, Kmara set out to eliminate corruption in the university system and then in the Georgian government. Its plan was to spread throughout Georgia, as Otpor did in Serbia, and mobilize opposition against Shevardnadze's regime in the 2005 Presidential elections. Its method of expansion was by offering three-day "summer school" training sessions in Tbilisi and at Tskhvarichamia, a health resort town near Tbilisi, covering topics such as nonviolent public protest, basic human rights, handling the media, and what to do if detained. The leaders trained 2,000 members, of which eighty percent became actively involved in fifteen to twenty cities throughout Georgia. Funding for the movement's pre-revolutionary activities came from the Soros Foundation which enabled it to open an office and create a website.

Kmara Today

4. Recent news reports cited a fragmentation of Kmara when 250 activists left the movement. According to a local news report broadcast on 3 June, 2004, some of these members supposedly joined the party "Samartilianoba" (Justice) of Igor Giorgadze, who is living in exile in Russia and wanted for an alleged assassination attempt on ex-President Eduard Shevardnadze. This party has no real agenda except to put Giorgadze in power in Georgia. According to [] the number of those that left Kmara was inflated. They claim that only a handful of people left and that their departure is insignificant since it is very easy to become a part of and leave the movement. The only

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connection that [] drew between those that left and why they joined this party is a similarity in the surname of two members with Giorgadze. However, the Justice party and Kmara do share a common anti-Shevardnadze sentiment. Members of the breakaway faction were unavailable for comment.

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5. [] believe Kmara's role in society has evolved since its birth. Before the revolution they wanted to set an example to society to not be afraid to oppose the government. The movement focused on mobilizing society in order to fight corruption and bring about reforms in the government, especially in the education system. Georgians say that the youth movement played a crucial role at its peak during the Rose Revolution in helping to mobilize the people in protest against the fraudulent parliamentary elections. Kmara leaders continue to see themselves as social mobilizers, but more importantly they emphasize their role as a watchdog organization.

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6. When asked about whether she considers Kmara to be an NGO or a "movement," [] replied that it was not an NGO because they were not registered as such. In order to do so, a group must have a certain number of members.

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[] claim that before the revolution the movement had about 2,500 members a number that jumped to 10,000 at the peak of the revolution. Kmara's approximate current membership is about 3,000, although the interviewees admitted that it is very difficult to get an exact count as members are self-selected and flow freely in and out of the movement. Furthermore, the movement still has no funding and once again lacks its own office space from which to work (reftel). [] offered that funding and space for Kmara are no longer necessary because everyone knows that in order to find the organization, they should just call [] mobile phone. It is also noteworthy that Kmara's website has recently been inaccessible, unbeknownst to the interviewed activists, due to the lack of funding.

7. [] said that Kmara has expanded to other regions of Georgia. The movement does not actively seek out members, but it guides those interested in being an activist under the Kmara name. Kmara will help them strategically plan and send resources, such as stickers and t-shirts, to the interested group, as they did in Ajara and have begun to do in South Ossetia.

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Regional Activity: Ajara and South Ossetia

8. [] stated that in December 2003, Ajaran students contacted Kmara's Tbilisi HQ, asking for help and permission to march under the Kmara name. The movement focused on speaking out against Aslan Abashidze and remained

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underground until February 2004, when it officially opened its first office. The movement came out in protest after Abashidze blew up the bridges to Ajara. Once Kmara began to speak out, local authorities beat members and ransacked their office. [] claims that in Ajara Kmara mobilized 16,000-20,000 people to protest against Abashidze. The group's other activities in Ajara include election monitoring although [] said that they will not send monitors for the Ajaran local elections on 20 June, 2004. According to [] current Kmara membership in Ajara is about 600. The Kmara's representatives in Tbilisi are uncertain whether the office in Batumi still remains open.

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9. [] noted with enthusiasm that Kmara activists have also recently been active in South Ossetia. The movement there is still underground and activists' efforts have been limited to putting up stickers. It currently has one group of 20 Georgians and South Ossetians and hopes to organize a second group that is not in contact with the first group. This strategy is to assure that if authorities detain one group, the other group can still be active. Kmara's timeline for progress in South Ossetia, meaning reunification of the region with the rest of Georgia, is one year. (Comment: This plan does not appear to be well thought out. End comment.) According to [] the group is emphasizing the importance of achieving unification without violence.

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10. [] said that Kmara also hopes eventually to expand into Abkhazia via connections with IDPs in Tbilisi. The goal is to unite Abkhazia with the rest of Georgia. They have no time frame or solid plan for doing this however.

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The Future of Kmara

11. In addition to expanding and focusing on more infrastructure problems, such as in the penitential system, law enforcement, pensions and salaries, [] emphasized Kmara's intention to stay active as a watchdog organization (just as Serbia's Otpor has done). The Tbilisi representatives' agenda and work largely overlaps with that of the Liberty Institute, where some of the movement's leaders work. The group responds based on cases brought to their attention by anyone who calls upon them (or the Liberty Institute). This "hotline approach" is how they fulfill their new role as democratic watchdog. When asked whether they would like to become an NGO, the Kmara leaders hesitated and stated that they were uncertain that they wanted to take such a step.

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12. Comment: While Kmara definitely sees the youth movement as an important element in the Rose Revolution, the change

of government has left them without a raison d'etre. Without a government to oppose, they latch on to any cause (specifically of the Liberty Institute) where a fight can be picked. Although their role as a watchdog organization could be useful, the apparent lack of structure could potentially undermine the movement's legitimacy as being a benefit to Georgia. Increasingly, sentiments may emerge leaving Georgian society feeling as if it has had enough of "Enough." This is not to say that Kmara as a movement is a useless civil entity. As they demonstrated in the Rose Revolution and even in Ajara, Kmara activists are effective mobilizers, who could be useful in helping Georgia develop a truly democratic civil society that is not afraid to engage in opposition, even against Saakashvili's popular new government. [] did comment however that opposition under such a popularly supported regime would prove difficult. In the end, their effectiveness will greatly depend on whether the leaders of Kmara stick around to guide the movement or let it flounder passively at the whims of other organizations and individual grievances. Without more than a personal mobile telephone, the latter scenario seems to be the most likely. The fragmentation of the organization, reported only by one news station, appears to have deserved the little attention it received. End Comment.

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